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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 006370

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/27/2014

TAGS: PTER ASEC JO IO

SUBJECT: JORDAN SEIZED BY HOSTAGE CRISIS IN IRAQ

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Two Jordanian truck drivers, who work for a Jordanian company operating in al-Qaim, were seized by militants in Iraq on July 26. The kidnappers reputedly have demanded that the company withdraw from Iraq and pay a ransom. Despite GOJ advice not to give in to the demands, their employer decided to announce he intended to "freeze" its operations there. Under intense pressure from the men's tribe and families, GID chief Saad Kheir ultimately acquiesced on "humanitarian" grounds. Jordanians reacted strongly to the televised images of the two truckers, which came against the backdrop of news that the brother of one of Jordan's female members of Parliament was killed in Iraq under suspicious circumstances. End Summary.

GOJ WORKS FOR HOSTAGE RELEASE BEHIND THE SCENES

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¶2. (C) Jordanian officials on July 27 were preoccupied with efforts to secure the release of two Jordanian truck drivers kidnapped July 26 in the Iraqi town of al-Qaim on the Iraqi-Syrian border. According to press reports, their abductors threatened to kill them in 72 hours unless their employer, Daoud and Partners (reportedly a subcontractor of an American company) agreed to pull out of Iraq. MFA official Ali al-Ayed identified the hostages as Fayez Sa'ad al-Adwan from the southern Shuneh area of Jordan and Ahmad Salameh Hassan, a resident in al-Baqaa Palestinian refugee camp.

¶3. (C) During a midday meeting to discuss a separate matter, General Intelligence Directorate (GID) Chief Saad Kheir told Charge that he had advised company officials not to give in to the kidnappers' demands and recommended they cancel a press conference in which they intended to announce the cessation of operations in Iraq. He assured the company that the GOJ was working through the Iraqi security services and U.S. military to locate the men and secure their release.

Kheir added that one of the family members had received a \$100,000 ransom demand over his cellular phone from someone who purported to be a kidnapper, but the call could not be traced and there are doubts about its authenticity. Kheir confided he was under enormous pressure from the family members and leaders from Adwan's tribe to win their release -- and took calls from them throughout the meeting.

¶4. (C) Two hours later, Kheir called Charge back to relate a reversal: the company would announce it was freezing its activities in Iraq to save the lives of its employees. Kheir said the GOJ would go along with the decision for "humanitarian" reasons, but he viewed it more as a "tactical" move because he expected the company to continue operating in Iraq, and to retain its U.S. contract, perhaps by using a different name. Kheir added he would not object if the company decided to pay the kidnappers "under the table" to ensure the hostages' safety. Charge said that the U.S. did not support negotiating with terrorists. Acquiescing in these demands would only invite additional kidnappings.

JORDANIANS REVILED BY HOSTAGE CRISIS

¶5. (C) Jordanians reacted strongly to this latest hostage crisis in Iraq -- which has suddenly brought the violence closer to home. Many expressed their revulsion at the televised images of the two drivers seated on a floor with six militants menacing in the background, one holding a sword. Several Jordanian columnists -- likely reflecting widespread sentiment among ordinary Jordanians -- demanded the GOJ do whatever it takes to secure the release of their brethren. Of note, the hostage crisis comes against the backdrop of news that a Jordanian businessman working in Iraq -- the brother of Irbid MP Nariman Roussan -- was killed in Mosul in unknown circumstances. His family members told reporters that 45-year-old Marwan Zuheir al-Roussan had received warnings to leave Iraq, but did not specify from whom.

¶6. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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